

Jackson County Site Selection #1

Demographics

Jackson County serves the largest child welfare population across all program areas in the state. During SFY-03, Jackson County served 13.4% of the entire child welfare population, followed by St. Louis City serving 11.3% and St. Louis County serving 11.1%. With the largest child welfare population, Jackson County was chosen by our federal partners as the first site selection for Missouri.

Jackson County has a population of 655,855 and is an urban/rural geographical mix located on western side of the state. Kansas City and immediate suburbs such as Lee's Summit, Blue Springs, Grandview and Independence would comprise the urban core. Smaller towns such as Grain Valley, Buckner, Fort Osage and Lone Jack are more rural. Jackson County Children's Division is divided into 6 geographical offices that serve designated sections of the county. The locations are referred to as: Midtown, Uptown, Downtown, South, East and Southeast offices.

The Jackson County population consists of people from many ethnic backgrounds. The 2000 census indicated a racial mix of 70% White, 23% African American, 5% Hispanic, .5% American Indian, 1% Asian, etc. There is an over representation of African American children placed in alternative care. Currently, this issue has not been resolved and on-going probe is continuing.

Caseloads and staffing

There are 221 Children's Services Worker allocations in Jackson County. These positions include staff who recruit and license foster parents, investigate and assess Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline reports, work with intact families, kinship and relative families, as well as children who are in a foster care placement. Staff have also been designated to find alternative care placements for children, find adoptive placements for children who are awaiting adoption and work with families receiving adoption subsidy. The services available to families and children are consistent with those provided in the rest of the state. Services such as counseling, day treatment, child care, mentoring, parent aide, and Medicaid are available to meet the safety, risk and well-being needs of children.

The Jackson County Children's Division's office is unique from the rest of the state in that it is under a Consent Decree which requires specific issues to be resolved and conditions must be met for dissolution. The Consent Decree primarily focuses on children who are in the care and custody of the state and falls under the 16th Circuit jurisdiction. An example of one of the Consent Decree's requirements is a caseload size standard. This standard limits the number of cases an alternative care service worker to 14 class members (legal status 1) and 25 total children (14 legal status 1, plus nine other children in other program areas).

Jackson County is also unique to the remainder of the state in that it has four staff and one supervisor that form an internal Quality Assurance Unit. The main function of the unit is to monitor compliance for the requirements of the Consent Decree. The unit also provides assistance and case activity tracking to staff whose caseloads do not fall under the requirements of the Consent Decree.

Community Involvement

Jackson County is organized into six geographical areas to better integrate the Division's services more closely with community based services and increase opportunities for community interaction. For example, staff partner with local law enforcement departments, area school districts and community centers. Staff also collaborates with local churches and libraries recruiting potential new foster and adoptive homes.

There is an alliance consisting of area medical personnel to oversee medical care issues pertinent to children who are under the court jurisdiction or supervision. Jackson County is fortunate to have two very good resources within Children's Mercy Hospital and Truman Medical Center to meet the medical needs of children. Both hospitals are very involved with the community and have partnered with the Division to provide consultation and training for staff on various medical issues.

There continues to be an on-going effort to improve and enhance the interactions between the Family Court and the Jackson County Children Division offices. This includes opening the lines of communication and obtaining a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of job duties and promoting more timely permanency for children. To address the issue of permanency, during January 2003 the Jackson County 16th Circuit Family Court established a judicial case management system. This process is designed to engage parents immediately after a decision is made to place their children in protective custody. The system is designed to assigned an attorney for the parents (if needed) within 72 hours, keep family meetings focused on the safety and risk issues which brought the child and family to the attention of the Court, and concentrates their efforts on what needs to happen so permanency may be established more quickly. This process creates more interaction between the members of the entire service team including court personnel, Division staff, and the parent's attorney.

As a result of the Consent Decree, a Community Quality Assurance (CQA) Committee was established. This committee is comprised of local stakeholders representing education, mental health, medical professionals, foster parents, domestic violence, court personnel, and others. This group responds to issues that have been identified as concerns based on the various reviews completed in Jackson County and provides solutions to those concerns to improve outcomes for children and families.

Federal Outcomes

Jackson County's met four of the six federal outcomes measures in SFY-03. Jackson County results, using internal data from Research and Evaluation, are as follows:

Recurrence of maltreatment

- Federal Benchmark -- 5.9% or fewer
- Jackson County -- 4.80%

Incidence of child abuse and neglect in foster care (by foster parent or residential facility staff)

- Federal Benchmark -- .57% or less
- Jackson County -- 0.57%

Length of time to achieve reunification

- Federal Benchmark -- 76.2% or more
- Jackson County -- 81.18%

Length of time to achieve adoption

- Federal Benchmark -- 32% or more
- Jackson County -- 63.43%

Foster Care Re-entries

- Federal Benchmark -- 8.6% or less
- Jackson County -- 18.26%

Stability of foster care placements

- Federal Benchmark -- 86.7% or more
- Jackson County -- 79.79%